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## NOTES AND COMMENTS.

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### I.

#### PRESIDENT LINCOLN'S LETTER TO GOVERNOR HAHN.

MORE than once it has been questioned whether Abraham Lincoln, had he lived, would have proved competent to deal with the problem of the reconstruction of the Southern States. But such questioners have forgotten that Lincoln did meet and solve that problem successfully, in at least one instance—and that, too, without undue interference with the reserved rights of the States. It was by his direct personal influence that civil government was restored to Louisiana. He and his Cabinet had, indeed, partially agreed on a plan for the rehabilitation of the South, and had he completed the term for which he had been elected, that plan would no doubt have been carried out. The scheme that he had sketched, his successor sought to follow; but the master was gone, and the apprentice blundered.

The movement toward reconstruction in Louisiana came earlier than in any other State. It was on May 1st, 1862, that General Butler became Commander of the Military Department of New Orleans. On the twenty-third of May, 1863, the various Union associations of that city applied to General G. F. Shepley, then Military Governor of the State of Louisiana, for authority to call a convention of loyal citizens, and the President was duly informed of the application. In June of the same year, a number of planters, desirous of the restoration of civil authority, yet not concurring in the policy of the previous applicants, requested the President to grant a full recognition of the rights of the State, as they existed before secession. These applications, and various other indications, had satisfied Lincoln that the time had come when the work of reconstruction might be safely commenced, and his message to Congress in December, 1863, and his proclamation dated December 8th of the same year, led to an extended discussion of reconstruction in the public press and by prominent politicians. In the meantime, on December 3d, General Shepley had ordered an election in New Orleans for members of Congress, and B. F. Flanders and Michael Hahn had been elected.

On the eighth of January, 1864, a very large free-state convention was held at New Orleans, and it urged measures for the restoration of the civil authority. On January 11th, General Banks, who had succeeded General Shepley as Military Governor, issued a proclamation appointing an election for State officers on February 22d, and another election, for delegates to a constitutional convention, on the first Monday in April. At the election of

February 22d, Michael Hahn was elected Governor; on March 4th, he was duly inaugurated; and, on March 15th, he was invested, by order of the President, with the powers previously exercised by the Military Governor.

All of Lincoln's writings imply a degree of culture in schools which he never had—none more so than the letter which, on the thirteenth day of March, he wrote to Governor Hahn. The phrase, "*keep the jewel of liberty in the family of freedom*," will live forever, and will be a token of the eloquence of his pen, as the reconstruction of Louisiana is of his far-sighted and generous statesmanship.

Having obtained the original of the letter in which this famous phrase occurs, I take pleasure in reproducing it, in *fac-simile*, for the readers of the NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW.

EDITOR.

## II.

### THE NEWSPAPER HABIT AND ITS EFFECTS.

WHEN Dr. Benjamin Rush died, he bequeathed his books, with a considerable endowment, to the Philadelphia Library. This munificent bequest was made on the express condition that no part of the income of the fund should ever be expended on the purchase of newspapers. He styled them "teachers of disjointed thinking." Is this expression justifiable? Is the influence of newspapers actually detrimental to habits of consecutive thought?

It is somewhat singular that these questions should now be considered debatable; for journalists continually assert that every other form of literary activity is outgrown and doomed to speedy extinction. Libraries are to meet the fate of the Alexandrian, and we shall parody the Mohammedan conqueror by exclaiming, "If all this is not in the columns of the *New York Herald* it must be worthless, and if it is there it is useless here." Oratory is doomed; for the editorial article will have supplanted it. Our philosophy and our religion (if, in those days, we shall have need of either) are to come to us filtered through the reporter's Monday morning recollections of the clergyman's sermon of the day preceding.

If the truth of these estimates of the value of newspapers depended on the frequency with which they have been repeated, every one must long since have been persuaded. As it is, to a large majority of persons it is definitely settled that no literature ever was of such priceless value as the modern newspaper. Yet no proposition can justly rest on the universality of its acceptance. We may be almost inclined to say with Champfort that "all conventional ideas are to be regarded as *à priori* false." Even if we do not go to this length, we are certainly justified in questioning dogmas whose validity depends exclusively on the fact that they are universally believed. At least, it ought not to be a conclusive argument that newspapers are useful in exact proportion to the need which most persons feel for them.

For it might be plausibly maintained that the abuse of newspaper reading, betrayed in their inordinate consumption, is in the strictest sense a bad habit; that it is a mild form of mania which needs regulation and control as much as other petty vices of human nature. The daily experience of many persons will

Private

Executive Mansion,

Washington, March 13, 1864.

Hon. Michael Heahn

My dear Sir:

I congratulate you on having fixed your name in history as the first free-state Governor of Louisiana. Now you are about to have a Convention which, among other things, will probably define the elective franchise. I barely suggest for your private consideration, whether some of the colored people may not be let in— as, for instance, the very intelligent, and especially those who have fought gallantly in our ranks. They would probably keep, in some trying time to come, to keep the jewels of liberty within the family of freedom. But this is only a suggestion, not to the public, but to you alone.

Yours truly  
A. Lincoln